

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 5831

EXDIS

ARA FOR TODMAN ONLY; S/AB FOR BUNKER/POPPER ONLY;
NSC FOR PASTOR ONLY

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PBOR, PN, GT
SUBJ: PANAMA CANAL TREATY REACTION

REF: STATE 219477

1. ALTHOUGH GUATEMALA HAS CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED PANAMANIAN CONTROL OF THE CANAL, IT IS NOT THE GUT ISSUE HERE THAT IT MAY BE ELSEWHERE IN LATIN AMERICA. IN THEIR HEART OF HEARTS, DOUBTLESS SOME GUATEMALANS MAY EVEN REGARD THEIR INTERESTS AS BETTER SERVED BY AN INDEFINITE US STEWARDSHIP OVER THE CANAL RATHER THAN SUBMITTING THEMSELVES TO THE VAGARIES OF THE PANAMANIAN REGIME OF THE MOMENT. CURRENT ANIMOSITY TOWARDS TORRIJOS COLORS THIS ATTITUDE. THAT SAID, MOST INFORMED OPINION HERE CONSIDERS THE TREATY SIGNING A HEALTHY AND LONG OVERDUE DEVELOPMENT. MOST HAVE NO TROUBLE WITH THE VIEW EXPRESSED BY FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER (UNDER YDIGORAS) ALBERTO FUENTES MOHR (NOW IN THE CENTER-LEFT OPPOSITION) THAT THE TREATY "GOES SOME OF THE WAY TOWARDS REPAIRING THE DAMAGE WROUGHT BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT." THERE IS LITTLE FEELING HERE THAT THE US ACTED FROM WEAKNESS AND, IN A SOCIETY WHICH SPAWNED "THE SHARK AND THE SARDINES," ONLY THE MOST MUTED OF RUMINATIONS
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ABOUT THE INTERVENTIONIST POTENTIAL OF SOME OF THE PROVISIONS ON THE NEUTRALITY TREATY. THE NEWSPAPER LA NACION'S DISMISSAL OF THE CANAL AGREEMENT AS "AN OLD TREATY IN NEW DRESS" WAS A DISTINCTLY MINORITY OPINION.

2. AS EVIDENCED BY THE TONE OF THE COMMUNIQUE ISSUED WHEN PRESIDENT LAUGERUD ACCEPTED THE INVITATION TO ATTEND THE SIGNING

CEREMONY (GUATEMALA 5519), AND HIS READY ACCEPTANCE OF THE DECLARATION OF WASHINGTON, THE GOG HAD NO DIFFICULTY IDENTIFYING ITSELF WITH THE TREATIES. THE SUBJECT WAS EVEN GIVEN A PROMINENT PLACE IN THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED SEPTEMBER 13 ON THE DEPARTURE OF THE SPANISH MONARCHS, NAMELY: "BOTH PARTIES CONGRATULATE THEMSELVES (SIC) ON THE SUCCESS OF THE PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AND THE FORM IN WHICH THEY CULMINATED IN THE SEPTEMBER 7, 1977, SIGNING OF THE TREATY IN WASHINGTON BETWEEN PANAMA AND THE USA. THE TWO CHIEFS OF STATE AGREE THAT THE SOLUTION REACHED REPRESENTS A MODEL OF PEACEFUL AND FRIENDLY UNDERSTANDING WHICH THE TWO COUNTRIES IN QUESTION OFFER TO INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY AS AN EXAMPLE." IT DETRACTS LITTLE FROM GUATEMALAN SINCERITY ON THIS SCORE TO NOTE THEIR HOPE THAT THE US EXAMPLE WILL INFLUENCE THE UK TO SATISFY GUATEMALAN POLITICAL NEEDS ON THE BELIZE ISSUE, WHICH IS COMPARABLE IN THEIR EYES TO THE CANAL ISSUE IN PANAMA.

3. I AM SURE THAT OUR FAILURE TO RATIFY WOULD BE CRITICIZED HERE AND WOULD BE READ AS A MARKED FAILURE IN OUR EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT A MORE ENLIGHTENED POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA. NEVERTHELESS, MAKING ALLOWANCES FOR LATIN POLITENESS, I SENSE THAT FEW GUATEMALANS SEE THE CANAL TREATIES AS MARKING THE THRESHOLD OF A DRAMATIC NEW ERA IN US-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS. THEY ARE SEEN AS ONE MEASURE, ALBEIT AN IMPORTANT ONE, OF US INTENTIONS IN THE AREA. THUS NON-RATIFICATION WOULD CAUSE SOME DISILLUSIONMENT HERE BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD HAVE
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SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR US-GUATEMALAN RELATIONS, WHICH WILL TURN ON MORE NARROWLY BILATERAL CONCERNS. THE PUBLICITY SURROUNDING THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS HAS MADE GUATEMALANS QUITE ALIVE AND FOR THE MOST PART SYMPATHETIC TO THE DIFFICULTIES THE WHITE HOUSE CONFRONTS IN GAINING RATIFICATION. MOST WILL APPRECIATE THAT IF THE TREATIES FAIL IN THE SENATE IT WILL NOT HAVE BEEN FOR WANT OF TRYING.
BOSTER

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